Chapter V

A Synoptic Discussion and Summation

"Suppose you cut a tall bamboo in two
make the bottom piece a woman,
the headpiece a man;
rub them together till they kindle:
tell me now, the fire that is born,
Is it male or female, O,Ramanatha?"

‘Vasana’ by Devara Dasimayya, Trans. from the Kannada
By A.K.Ramanujan (TFN Prelude)

The postcolonial feminist literature negotiates with the challenging and the changing status of women in the context of tradition that binds, and new found individuality that defies. The preoccupation of the present scholar is to figure out the culture subject of modern Indian women of Postcolonial days, as they are caught up in historical and cultural bed of encounters. The colonizers highlighted the misery of Indian women, tracing it to the roots of Indian culture. The new values, like individuality, freedom and free subjectivity have been glorified as the boons of modern civilization and western education. The question, however, remains, regarding the level of transcendence and identity with one’s own culture.

The paramount interest of this researcher is to locate the three selected women writers in the formal discussion on female subjectivity, with culture as its vital parameter. The question that remains is: how could women writers, who attempt to break the barriers of culture, could also locate the subjectivity of Indian women in India’s culture? In the three preceding chapters, the discussions have been orientated towards subjectivity, which is granted to the principal women characters, through a process of experience. The thesis addresses three types of experiences: subjectivity identified through a process of collective composite experience of life, wherein the personal and the private domains collapse;
secondly, the experience is acquired from mother-daughter relationship with changing emotional levels of attachment and detachment; and thirdly, the principal characters’ experience during a process of quest, the world-to-home mobility syndrome. The detailed analysis of the select novels of Githa Hariharan, Anita Nair and Indira Ganesan, highlights the truth that decolonization attempts do exist concurrent to the culture immersion exercise.

Raman Sheldon’s ‘Aquinas Theory’ refers to form and matter as masculine and feminine respectively and it assigns a superior status to male intellect. Man’s intellect impresses its form on the female matter (129). This however seems to accept that the woman is inert and malleable. While the patriarchal system considers man as a moulding agent of the female matter, the woman fiction attempts to reverse the role with a rider. Women writers highlight the fact that man, and the patriarchal system structured by man, recommends a moulded inert status for woman. They would like to see woman not as a malleable and ductile matter; instead, they would like her to be a ‘Liquid Woman’, very much like a stream of running water. Liquidity is ungraspable. Such a formless form, subverts the theory that the form is masculine. The Hindu patriarchal custom treats woman as a solid subject of endurance and patience. This is no more valid in the changed living conditions of the Postcolonial age. A close study of the narratives of the three authors chosen for discussion reveals the frontiers of concern of recent Indian women writers. The feminists’ favourite theme is founded on the corner stones of sexuality and subjectivity and the present writers go one-step forward arguing for an assertion of female sexuality or sensibility. Emerging from the frontiers of patriarchal politics and aggressive emancipatory interventionist struggles, women have now entered into an inner world of subjectivity conditioned by the body poetics rather than the external politics. Herein lies the difference between Indian women writers and their contemporaries of the West.
The paradigm of empowerment or the possibilities of acquiring the true subjectivity, for the women of India, lie in a paradigm that is exclusively India. The most preferred space still seems to be the family space for Indian women writers. The overwhelming pressure also comes from culture, the local granted space of the conditioned behaviours. The wish to be a liberated free subject is likely to be a reality. Only during an interface with the fellow women of native culture who would provide them with a composite experience of a wholesome woman. This is also possible only within the culture space of India. Hence, the pattern of preference; these spaces of comfort and the empathic experiences - and everything comes to them only in an Indian space. Hence, these writers’ favourite choice of subject seems to be family, the overwhelming pull of home rather than the world and India with its paradigm of attributes to be transcended, cultivated and changed. In short, recent women writers are very much Indian, as they wish very much to be a woman. The foregoing discussions of the five novels of the three women writers considered in the previous three chapters are worth recapitulating here for confirming this finding.

Githa Hariharan in her _When Dreams Travel_ makes her critical notes on the spaces of liberation available in myths, tales and legends. She re-reads the tale and constructs woman as the protagonist, unmasking the patriarchal hand that disempowers women of mythical and historical past of India, Persia and Arabia, the lands known as regions of wisdom as well as savagery. As she rewrites the tales and focuses the female space in the myths, her subversion game becomes an illumination, a revelation on woman’s intellect, wisdom, power and success. In countries like India, myths, legends, folk tales, superstitions, gods and goddesses representing elements and superior powers are believed to be dominating and thereby influencing the lives of the common people, especially the poor and illiterate. Hence storytelling, dreams and fantasies occupy an important place in the life of women. _Puranas_ and _Idihasas_, (ancient epics of gods and goddesses), and the celestial
beings, invariably captivate the children and young ones and influence their lives in a significant manner. Being an Indian Feminist writer, Githa Hariharan, uses this story-telling narrative, which is unobtrusive, but in reality, her women emerge sharper and more powerful than the "Royal Sword". A silent crusader, she has proven the power of silence, and subverts the linear narrative of the ancient and well known 1001 Arabian Nights. Her legal victory (Feb. 1999) in the case of Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act of 1956, wherein, the mother also is accepted as the natural guardian of the children (Antonia Navarro – Tejero : 203) indicates that she is a modern 'Dunyazad', a Law—Maker and a powerful catalyst for much needed social change in the realm of women.

Patriarchal ideologies continue to prevail in India. The relationship between grandparent and grandchildren are bonded with folk tales and stories. But in most of those songs and stories of ancient traditions, the male protagonist fights with the giants, while the female protagonist, beautiful and amiable, docile and meek, is kept locked in a tower, a palace, a garden, or a cave; she is chained, or locked, or imprisoned and sometimes not even conscious of her state, but laid in a deep slumber. Only with the help of a chivalrous (man) prince, or soldier, or merchant, the young girl is redeemed. But Githa Hariharan, cleverly and subtly reverses the elements of the tales in such a way that in her novel When Dreams Travel the dark death trap ‘a dingy mildewed dungeon’ becomes the gateway to the new bright and liberated life (birth) for women. Articulation is the first step in the process of empowerment; communication next, and it should be followed by action.

Resistance is one of the important characteristics of Postcolonial narratives. It manifests itself as a refusal to be aborted, taking the array of influences exerted by the dominating power, and alerting them into tools for expressing a deeply held sense of identity and cultural being. Above all, transformation has been the most powerful and
active form of resistance, a very integral part of the imagination of these societies. Jasbir Jain observes, "What has happened in the last three decades has not been an isolated development; it is the result of the efforts of hundreds of women across cultures and languages who have resisted domination" (6). The drive to emancipate and re-empower is the distinct Postcolonial identity. Githa Hariharan does this job in all her early literary writings – *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *When Dreams Travel*.

Devi, the protagonist of *The Thousand Faces of Night*, has been fed by stories and tales from Hindu (ancient) myths and legends by her grandmother. Her father-in-law too explains her, the values of an ideal woman, in her role as wife and mother, citing, examples from *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. But Devi chooses her own ideal idol – Shakti, and decides to begin 'life a new'. A very different picture of the heroines of *1001 Nights* emerges at the end of *When Dreams Travel*. The Wazir's daughters, Shahrazad and Dunyazad, successfully complete the 'circle with no beginning or end', leaving the question to the universal woman. "I fought for myself, for you as well. What will you do when your turn comes?" (*WDT* 276). Bill Ashcroft in *Postcolonial Transformation* comments thus:

Like the rewritings of Robinson Crusoe, re-readings of Jane Austen, and the re-writings of *Heart of Darkness* by Chinua Achebe in his *Things Fall Apart*, the element of resistance in the novel, *When Dreams Travel*, is fully effective; though its exposure of the darkness of the cruel past and colonial power may be trenchant and relentless, it transforms the view of cultural and social possibilities. (33)

Today any modern woman is able to figure out her dilemma in terms of what has happened to the mythological characters. To cite an example, in the story of Gandhari in *The Mahabharatha*, the Queen Gandhari chooses darkness even when she gives her consent
to marry Thirudhrashtra, the Blind King. In both the novels, *When Dreams Travel* and *The Thousand Faces of Night*, there are two levels of meanings from the past. At the surface level, the narrative is linear and straight but at deeper level, there is a kind of rewriting of the myth. In the case of *When Dreams Travel* it is subverting and rewriting of the stories from the past or myths. In the case of *The Thousand faces of Night*, a straight forward archetypal meaning emerges. Women have found themselves in darkness – there is no chance to see any face in darkness- one or thousand faces. In a straightforward reading of mythology, Githa Hariharan advocates a kind of choice, even from among the roles by divine Kali – the Active agent. An interventionist role by women is advocated especially from those who are in darkness. Among these goddesses, there is a fight between good and evil. So, in order to set things right, to demolish evil, an active agent, and not a passive god is required –Redemption is possible, not by passivity, but by activity. This is the message that emerges from these texts. However, in reality only passivity is worshipped. (Sita, Lakshmi are meek and docile sacrificial goddesses) It is a kind of sublimation process that is recommended by the writer, emulating Kali, Devi and Shakthi - symbols of power. Hence, the command, ‘Woman, Be a ‘Kali’, not a docile, meek and subservient woman. Be aware and accept the reality – the real self; rise up to empower by activity. Emancipation and sublimation will be the rewards’ (*TFN* 41- 46, 120).

Both Women narratives and Postcolonial discourses seek to reinstate the marginalised in the face of the dominance of the male members in the patriarchal society. An early feminist theory like nationalist postcolonial criticism was concerned with inverting the structures of domination on substituting, for instance, a female tradition or traditions for a male- dominated canon. In the words of Radhakrishnan,

This search for identity in the Third World is best seen primarily with the problem of location...Post Colonial subjectivity is made to choose between
its contemporary hybridity as sedimented by the violent history of colonialism and an indigenous genealogy as it existed prior to the colonist chapter. The subaltern path to self discovery lies through histories of negative identification where the subaltern consciousness identifies itself in terms of 'what it is not'. (750-771)

Indian society with its traditional, feudal, patriarchal structures (consolidated further during the period of colonization) seems to offer ample material and scope to the novelists desirous of subverting and dismantling the power structures. Official and institutionalized versions of history, patriarchal versions of womanhood, are the discourses that are to be contested and undermined by the subalterns. They destabilize the given versions, undermine them for their ideological underpinnings, and subvert them with installation of newer versions to correct relations of power in contemporary Indian society. Accordingly, Githa Hariharan’s novels deconstruct, well-established notions of history, family, tradition, patriarchy, etc., for their ideological underpinning. Robert Fraser clearly remarks: “It is said that the postcolonial writers have proved good at turning to their advantage certain colonial derived story lines” (168).

In imperial fiction, myths are very often decorative; in nationalist fiction, they are functional. In transcultural narratives, they offer local windows on to a much wide and an endlessly unravelling scene. Centuries of Indian tradition and age-old cultural beliefs have made an Indian Woman to be the most patient, obedient and loving woman in the world. Her suffering, silent screams, disappointments and frustrations are not heard even in this modern world of Feminism. The feeling of homelessness is indicative of inner disintegration.
Generally, there are two types of roles played by women characters in Indian Fiction; Conventional and Unconventional. Both types suffer in one way or the other. According to Balakothandaraman, “the Unconventional seem to suffer for their violation of accepted norms of society or questioning them :...” (14). The conventional women also suffer, but their suffering is sanctioned by the norms of Indian culture and particularly by that of a patriarchal culture. The conflict between tradition and modernity finds a prominent place in the portrayal of women by the women novelists.

A tradition bound woman may sacrifice her happiness for the sake of the well-being of the family as a unit, like Sita or Mayamma, or Shahrazad or Akhila or even Devi and Lakshmi (to a certain extent); but at the same time, she retains her individuality too. Indian woman usually does not mind her personal happiness and comfort as much as she addresses herself to the task of making others happy and discharging the ideal role of traditions and conventions. Rukmani and Chitra in The Journey by Indira Ganesan, and Akhila’s mother in Ladies Coupe belong to this category. A woman may be seen and understood by her son and daughter in some other ways and by herself in yet another way. Keeping all these views in mind, the (contemporary) modern Indian women novelists have problematised the same in their fiction.

By re-inventing the 1001 Nights, Githa Hariharan re-frames woman’s roles-Listener becomes the Speaker, Slave becomes the Master, Dreamer is the Worker, the Word overpowers the Sword, Magic becomes Reality, Sub-altern turns out to be King-Maker; above all the ‘Other’ becomes the centre in her novel When Dreams Travel. One who dares to dream only can realize them into great achievements. True to the title, Githa Hariharan’s dreams have travelled very far in the cause of women’s empowerment. For the emergence of new social order, it is essential that the old cultural agents and the transmission belts of the past are replaced or modified.
The women novelists find out certain customs and habits, which are prevalent in the life of subdued women of the patriarchal society. In some villages of India, it is a common sight that women gather near the pond or the common well to draw water. The time that they spend in this activity gives them the opportunity to meet and converse with other women in the village. It is not surprising to note that the women felt freer and much entertained during and after this conversation. Men ignore it as mere gossip. But the pent up feelings, dreams, ideas, plans, abilities etc. of the women take shape during this free exchange of ‘Gossip’.

The uniqueness of gossip, it seems to me, lies in the fact that in spite of being a marginal or peripheral discourse, it often works to define the social and moral boundaries of a community, ironically acknowledging and reproducing certain dominant societal perceptions....It is also revealing that the site of Gossip often tend to be certain luminal spaces in the village – between people’s houses, at the village pond, or the hand pump.... in spite of this quasi – underground nature, it succeeds in effectively policing the spaces in habited by people. (Seemanthini Naranjana 95)

In this gathering, the women feel very free to begin or open a conversation with even strangers. (New neighbours, new people, new settlers). Anita Nair takes up this habit and uses it in the novel to describe the exchange of ideas between Akhila and her fellow travellers.

The narratives of Indira Ganesan and Githa Hariharan have been studied in the light of changing roles of women in the Indian context. The central concern of the novelists is available for the reader at two levels, the first being the constant conflict and preferences and choices between mothers and daughters, the second being the mobility syndrome that
has arrived into the life of Indian women. Traditional Indian woman has got only one type of travel in her life—going from her father’s house to husband’s domain, when she gets married. Thereafter no travel is allowed for her. Even if they are queens, ‘vanaprastha’ or ‘vanvas’ is not granted. In the narratives, the present researcher finds the new generation women folks travelling into the worlds of new cultures deriving new experiences sometimes desiring non-Indian life-partners. During these sessions of dereliction, it becomes the duty of the mother to raise the voice of culture so as to discipline the daughter. Hence, the mother-daughter relationship dealt within the narratives deal with the dominant themes of home, world, travel, the conflict between tradition and modernity, and allegiance or resistance to one’s culture.

Indira Ganesan’s Inheritance and The Journey have meaningful titles for they deal with these recurrent themes of journey, quest and the crisis of inheritance. In Githa Hariharan’s The Thousand Faces of Night also the conflict between Sita and Devi occurs in the context of cultural observance as well as the chance of straying into an alien culture. In the present day of expanding culture, dual citizenships and international home making, what bothers Indian women seems to be the question of adopting and adapting to Indian culture. Alphonsa, the Spanish woman, becomes the naturalised Indian woman with no great mental conflict, while this is not possible for many of the Indian women characters like Renu, Devi, Sonil and others. Only Manx seems to be an exception.

Devi, Sita and Mayamma in The Thousand Faces of the Night represent the three generations of women in Hindu society. The mother-daughter relationship between Devi and Sita is a Love – Hate relationship. It is a result of the clash between Tradition and Modernity. The character portrayal of Devi provides some interesting and paradoxical points. She had a deep and secret longing for the emotional, expressive and purely maternal
love from her mother Sita, who appeared to be “our anchor – rock, never wrong, never to be questioned, a self-evident fact of our existence” (TFN 16).

Sita, belonging to the second generation of women, (middle aged) believes in self-discipline and hard work. She puts her heart and soul into music namely veena, and emerges as a very talented and creative artist of veena even at the young age of twenty before her marriage. But her enthusiasm and expectation receives a mortal blow by the angry roar of her father-in-law “Put that veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?” (TFN 30). She is in such a trance and rapturous flight that she cannot even hear the angry words of her father-in-law, till he comes up to her room and shouts at her, doubly enraged by the sight of Sita, head bent over the Veena lost in concentration. This incident is the turning point in Sita’s life – in her character. It is indeed a moment of life and death, creation and destruction. It is “a minute that seemed to stretch for ages” (TFN 30). It brings out the cruel reality and its different dimensions in a flash. She realized that neither her individuality with her inner longings and creative talents, nor her identity as a human being, as a person, as a woman is recognized, accepted, appreciated or encouraged in that patriarchal household. She is just a daughter-in-law, a woman, a servant, an object, a thing, an instrument, may be a little beautiful one. That is all. She is expected to discharge her duties as a meek, amiable, amicable, docile wife and daughter-in-law and should not expect or act as a privileged person, like the male members of the family.

Another interesting point to note here is that the father-in-law’s superior ego of the male dominated, patriarchal family has endless space to wield its authority, strikes a different jarring note in the melodious life of Sita, the musician. Sita the artist, dies and Sita, the Manager of the Family, emerges. The lyricism of Sahana, the Sampurna Raga like ‘Shankarabharanam’ are pushed to the depths of her inner self and on that cemented
platform, Sita builds the edifice called ‘Family’. She keeps on goading her husband to work incessantly to amass material assets, namely a big house, car, servants and a healthy bank balance.

When Devi is born, Sita does not allow anyone to touch the little one, considering the new arrival as the creative substitute of her veena. So, with all her heart and soul, Sita begins grooming, shaping, decorating, enriching, beautifying and perfecting Devi, ‘her tender, little veena’. But Devi, though quiet and apparently manageable, is as much of an oddity as her father, Mahadevan. So with all her talents and well – disciplined energy, Sita schemes. As always, the real decision, the final choice is hers. Though she allows Devi to stray a little now and then; the rein is always in her hands. According to Luce Irigaray,

the beginnings of patriarchy as we know it today which represents man as the legal head of the family, tribe or state coincided with the weakening of the female – female bond and especially the dissolution of the mother – daughter relationship. This relationship was destroyed to establish an order linked to private property and to the transmission of possessions within a male genealogy. Such a system ensured that property and children belonged to the same genealogy. (136-151)

In an unobtrusive and cunning manner, Sita usurps from Mahadevan, her husband, the real power and privileges that are the symbols of the head of the patriarchal family. Sita shows clearly that, she can and did, ‘rule with an iron hand’ (TFN 105). The total transformation of Sita is contextualised as an act of sublimation. She thinks and acts for all three of them i.e. herself, her husband and her daughter. She becomes the master crafts- woman, and expert, in the art of moulding the most moist and fragile of clay (human beings i.e. her daughter and husband) into the most effective, and beautiful shapes of her choice.
An ardent listener of Puranic stories of Amba, Gandhari and Damayanthi - Devi dreams of her own story, her own life in a vision in which she figures as a courageous woman warrior, a DEVI, “an incarnation of Durga, walking the earth to purge it of fat-jowled, slimy-tailed greed” (TFN 43). Her husband appears as a Royal knight and they are perfect companions, sharing each other’s load. So, it is surprising to note that Devi, much influenced by the idol moulds of illustrious ancestors from the Purana stories, and radically enriched by the experiential knowledge of Western life-style, should consent to marry the “Matter-of-fact” Mahesh, at such a short notice. It is the love-hate-love relationship of Devi and Sita that is partly responsible for Devi’s unsuccessful married life.

Devi feels much perplexed and confused whenever she is expected to make an important decision. Her attempts to date with Dan, her initial efforts to establish a home with Mahesh at Jarcanda Road, her elopement with Gopal, and even her final return to her mother, - all these actions are nothing but attempts of an alienated and estranged woman in search of her identity, and recognition of the same, by the people and society around her. The sign of acceptance and security that she longs for is psychological.

In the mother-daughter relationship between Sita and Devi, there is an element of awe and despair, which is keenly felt by the daughter. Sometimes the mother is perplexingly wondering, while at other times she is devilish and overpowering. In her attempt to escape the controlling powers of her mother, Devi scripts her moments of freedom. This is the complex and paradox, in Devi. Being a dreamer and bookish, like her father, she cannot solve or see the reality or truth behind the jigsaw puzzle namely her mother. Even when Sita arranges for her marriage, Devi can think of it only with sarcasm. She comments thus:

I have to give her credit for her sense of timing. When she had kneaded the dough finely, thoroughly and I was like putty in her hands, she enriched my
shoulders, so ready to lean against her support and led me to her carefully laid plans - a marriage for me, a swayamvara. (TFN 14)

This alienation, a void in her depths seeks fulfillment and liberation. Not finding the emotional rapport and true love in Mahesh, the radical and worldly husband, Devi wanders and is easily drawn by the crude handsomeness and flatteries of Gopal, the singer. The initial euphoria fades quickly and then she understands the peripheral status given to her by Gopal. Her inner and deeper self still feels the emptiness. Therefore, she returns to the beginning of her circle of love – her mother, in search of a deeper and genuine relationship.

In the words of Mayamma, Githa Hariharan exhorts Devi, the modern youth, to search for that forest you crave in your delirious youth. Go deep, deep, into its hollows, and into the wild terrors of its dark stretches. My words sing in a different direction and build a nest for the coming of night. Yours, thirsty, seek the river, miles away, where the dim forest gives way to a clear, transparent, flood of light. (TFN 126)

The juxtaposition of the character sketches of Mayamma, and Parvatiamma, (as the representatives of the lower, working class and the upper educated class) exposes the hypocrisy, and the entrenched prejudices of traditional Indian society. It is natural for a woman to be proud of her sexuality (physical beauty) but society expects her to be modest and hide her beauty. Mayamma attains puberty as she is playing in the temple. In an ironic sense, her sexuality, which is to be considered a divine gift, is viewed by the temple priest, a male bastion of religiosity and upholder of the Patriarchal norms, as a sacrilegious thing that has tainted the sacred premises. Even if the narrative treats her sexuality as a divine ‘given’, it is ironic that her motherhood is not a biological’ given’ and she has to go through years of penance and humiliation before she conceives. Mayamma finds refuge in the house
of a rich relative, Parvatiamma. In an ironic attitude of passive resignation, she continues her mechanical services to the same benevolent gods and goddesses, who have denied any kind of joy or solace to her in all her life. Though she appears to be a monument of silent endurance, the names of mother goddesses that she utters as she turns each “desiccated, shrivelled bead round and round are : “Shakti, Mahashakti, Parashakti, Durga, Singhavahini, Mahishashuramardhini, Kali, Maha Kali Bhadrakali, Shashti, Jaganmata, Sati, Haimavati, Pragaty Angora” (TFN 120). All are Avenging goddesses. The maxim ‘what cannot be cured should be endured’ – seems to be her motto of life with regard to this patriarchal tradition – bound society.

But the life of Parvatiamma is a good contrast to that of Mayamma. She is a Brahmin woman, married to an educated but conventional type of man of the patriarchal society. Parvatiamma felt the emptiness within and without. Baba marries her because of her name. After so many years of married life, suddenly one morning Parvatiamma, leaves her home in search of spiritual fulfillment. The reaction and comment of Baba reveals the subservient life and status of woman even in the so-called educated upper class – society. “She has made her choice. For a woman who leaves her house in search of a god, only death is a home coming” (TFN 64).

Ironically Baba’s selection of his wife by the choice of name (Hema, Mohana and Parvati)- without even looking at their photographs, proved to be a big mistake. It also reveals the male chauvinistic attitude of the male dominated Hindu society. Baba, the learned Professor, can express, explain and define the qualities, duties, behaviour and characteristics of a good woman, by giving examples from ancient religious puranas. But he cannot accept or understand or forgive his wife Parvati. If Mayamma suffers physical violence, Parvatiamma endures mental torture. Hence, she sets out on a search for inner
peace. Awareness of subjectivity always brings pain. Pain leads to reaction and reaction results in changes – positive or negative. Changes pave the way for development, which in turn moves towards the completion or fulfillment. Not succumbing to sorrow or despair, the three main characters of The Thousand Faces of Night, prove the strength of their womanhood in their struggle for survival, with a renewed awareness of their identity.

Indira Ganesan stands unique in her treatment of the theme of mother-daughter relationship in Free India. Though she seems to be guided by the rising awareness of identity and freedom among the teenage girls, Renu and Rukmani of The Journey juxtaposed with Sonil and Lakshmi of Inheritance uphold the critical plight of women, who are caught up between the traditional, patriarchal, culture-bound society and their inner, natural longings to live as emancipated, fulfilled and composite women. Rukmani oscillates between tradition and modernity. As a widow, she accepts the comforts of economical independence brought by her job at New York; but as a typical Hindu mother, she compels both her teenage daughters to comply with the cultural and age-old norms and expectations of the patriarchal family. It is interesting to note the difference of attitude to life between the two generations of women of Post-Independence era. The first generation women feel the awareness of their real self and womanhood. Hence, they try to seize the opportunities for educational and economic development. But their inner psyche is still not completely liberated from the clutches of certain cultural, social, and even political constraints. This is all the more evident in the life of Lakshmi, mother of Sonil, the Protagonist of the Inheritance. Caught between her deeper desires and emotional expectations of a healthy marriage and the marriage of convenience that is customary in patriarchal middle class Hindu society, the three attempts of Lakshmi culminate in sheer disappointment and despair. Lakshmi is branded as “mad woman” by the women of her neighbourhood for her ‘crime’ of crossing the threshold of tradition-bound family. Indira Ganesan hits at the
paradoxical and contradictory societal norms and rules in the character portrayal of Lakshmi. By going against the traditional marriage and family life, Lakshmi alienates herself from the society and converts this as a license to pursue an independent life.

Though the ‘new woman’ in Lakshmi appears to be free and frolicking, the ‘real mother’ in her is frightened of Sonil, her third daughter who appears to be a replica of her. The cruel disappointments of her loveless wedlock and affairs with two selfish men leaves such an indelible wounds in her heart that Lakshmi is afraid, even to show her love for her daughter Sonil. With deep and bitter experiences, she has found out that ‘romance doesn’t always work.’ There is a queer love-hate relationship between Lakshmi and Sonil, mother and daughter. Sonil tries to find solace outside the family. But the turmoil and tortures of her desertion by her deep love for Richard and the loss of her beloved grandmother make her understand and feel the pain of her mother. The meeting with her father at New York reveals the hidden truth about the goodness of Lakshmi. The love/hate cycle is completed and Sonil returns to the USA, as a changed, matured, free, and chastened woman.

In the course of the ordeal called living, the Indian Women generally find themselves at odds with society and undergo various degrees of psychological transformation. They grapple on the one hand with the changed realities of Indian life and on the other hand, they entail the trauma with the inner conflicts of personal lives. In the lives of some women, these conflicts and constraints reach the pinnacle at a particular point of life and consequently the repressed feelings result in many forms of resistance. Indira Ganesan’s wide acquaintance with the vagaries and nuances of life, both in the East and the West, along with her inherent intelligence, natural feminine sensibility and introspection, grant a realistic depth to her observations of women in Indian society. In the journey of
woman's life, inheritance plays an important role – the personality traits that one inherits from her parents form the basis of one's character and way of life.

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* provides a detailed note on the experience available for women outside home. This is something one gets as knowledge from the other. A modern woman becomes a real woman only when she understands better womenfolk of other stages, status and stations. This happens to Akhila, the protagonist, in her painful middle chapters of life, single and lonely, as she meets five other Indian women. As everyone tells the tale of lived experiences, the ideal suffering-woman of India emerges from their sharing. These most harmed suffering individuals provide the composite experience that leads them to understand the world better. They become strong enough to reject the man's moulded world and choose to live according to the dictates of their inner voices which has been muffled by patriarchy, tradition and culture. Interestingly, Anita Nair reworks the typical woman's tale which has in fact 'a one sentence story line' – (A woman in India suffers at all hands). Hence, the only choice available to them is to live according to the dictates of their inner voices. Like Githa Hariharan's *When dreams travel*, Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* works up the genre of tale as exclusively woman's form. Akhila, the protagonist of the novel *Ladies Coupe*, is the eldest of four children. From then on, she lives for the sake of her brothers and sisters only. After fifteen years, when her brothers and sisters are married and settled, Akhila turns her attention to herself. She wants to live alone. But her younger sister Padma and her brothers and her mother oppose the idea since it is against the custom of the society. Akhila at forty five, is a daughter, sister, aunt and the only provider of her family. She is disillusioned with these multiple roles and desires to escape, in search of her identity, reality, and her freedom. During a train journey she meets five other women as companions in the compartments.
This meeting turns out to be a memorable turning point in her life. In a sense, this is a situation familiar to many women of India. In some villages of India, it is a common sight that women gather near the pond or the common well to collect water. The time that they spend in this activity gives them the opportunity to meet and converse with other women in the village. It is not surprising to note that the woman feels free and much entertained during and after this conversation. But the pent up feelings, dreams, ideas, plans and abilities of the women take shape during this free exchange of 'gossip'. In this gathering, the women feel very free to begin or open a conversation with even strangers. Anita Nair uses this as the technique, and genre as she details the exchange of ideas between Akhila and her fellow travellers.

As long as women mutely accept and practise the age-old traditions and customs she is accepted as a good and obedient woman. Janaki who is married for forty years and has a doting husband tells Akhila of her wedding night, her daily routine and the boredom she has been enduring so long. The scene changes after the entry of the new daughter-in-law in to the family. Her son seems to have switched allegiance to his wife’s family and Janaki feels the emptiness within. In her sixties, Janaki thinks of her identity, freedom privileges and the long lost independence.

*You listen to me*- this is the voice of new woman, the young Sheela, of *Ladies Coupe*. She tells the women of her grandmother’s strange behaviour few days before her death. Her grandmother expresses her desire to be fully dressed up and to die in the same way. Putting aside the critical comments of her uncles and aunt Sheela helps her grandmother to die accordingly. She goes to the extent of decking the dead body of her grandmother, braving all sarcastic comments.
Prabha Devi, another fellow traveller in the *Ladies Coupe*, had everything in her life except freedom. On her trip to the western countries, she was influenced by the courage and confidence of the western woman. When she put on a modern look it ended up in deep trouble with a friend of her husband. Frightened, she withdrew to the traditional set up of a woman – wearing her saris, waiting for her husband’s return after job and giving birth to children. This dull life could not go on. Finally, she finds her internal freedom and confidence in swimming. She becomes a totally new woman.

The modern educated woman’s crusade against years of slavery, suffering and suppression is a serious one. The weaknesses and complexes that women come across in this process have been very honestly highlighted by the Indian women writers. As Pope has said of Addison, these woman “are willing to wound and yet afraid to strike”. Margaret Shanthi, a chemistry teacher, another fellow traveller in the coupe, is a good example to this factor. Though she marries her lover, Ebe, who is the principal of the school, she finds out the mean selfishness of her husband, much later. When her husband coaxes her into aborting the child, instead of encouraging her to continue with it and her research, she sees his selfish other side. He always finds fault with Margaret even petty matters. Margaret decides to exact revenge by making him eat more, and thereby give up his diet-conscious life style and finally converts him into a food gorger. The idealist and perfectionist in him gradually disappear along with his control over his physique, the staff and students in which he takes pride and pleasure.

A woman writer remarks; “When a man purses, besieges, and batters a woman’s body, he assaults a total world” (Stimpson 278) In India, more than 5000 cases of rape are annually reported to the police (R.P. Sharma 149). In addition to this other crimes against women have also been on the increase from year to year. Marikolunthu of *Ladies Coupe* is
a victim of such an assault. Neither her mother, nor her employer Sujatha Akka, could do anything to give her a remedy or some solace. On the other hand she has to endure the entire load of tortures single-handed and continues to serve in their household. She is simply ‘used’ by the so called, educated, rich, sophisticated, upper class members – both men and women in order to fulfill their selfish needs. She is able to give peace, solve their problems of loneliness, and even physical needs. But neither her family nor others helped her to fulfil her needs. Finally she realizes the reality of her position and accepts it without any inhibition. She has to live all alone. Ironically, it is the illiterate, lower, working-class woman Marikolunthu, who has been able to live in peace and provide peace to others.

At the end of the journey, the questions of Akhila are answered and doubts cleared. Akhila’s search for her identity, independence or freedom ends with the understanding that “Whatever is depended on others is misery; whatever rests on oneself is happiness” (TFN 68). When Paravatiamma, the old mother-in-law of Devi decides to go out of the house in search of spirituality, she facilitates her own independence. While Sita, Rukmani, Chitra, and Jani can be grouped under dependence in the context of identity, Devi, Akhila, Renu, Sonil, Marikolunthu, and Mayamma—all principal characters from the selected narratives of this research work—proceed to attain independence in the context of identity. In the case of dependent women, it is possible to attain what they need through an act of sacrifice. Sita has to give up veena, Rukmani has to live in America, and Chitra has to forget her music. It is interesting to note that the grandmothers however, are given independence though they belong to the same patriarchal society. Devi, Renu and Sonil are very much attached to their grandmothers and are equally influenced by them.

Githa Hariharan works upon Hindu Mythology, highlights the conflicts between Parvathi and Shiva, and adores Parvathi who is both benevolent and fierce. Although
usually presented in the West as dark and violent, Kali, a goddess, has a long and complex history in Hinduism. Her earliest history as a deity of annihilation still has some influence. In recent understanding of the goddess, Kali is benevolent. Kali is associated with many "devis" (goddesses) as well as the 'deva', Lord Shiva. Kali is generally considered as one of the consorts of Shiva. The goddesses that are associated include, Durga, Bhavani, Sati, Rudrani, Parvati, Chinnamasta, Chamunda, Kamakshmi, Uma, Meenakshi, Himavati, and kumari. When a worshipper chants these names, he is said to acquire extraordinary powers. This belief shows that Kali or Shakti is principally a goddess of power. Kali is life energy (Breath) when it enters into a Body. (Dead Body- Any Body that is without breath is Dead Body). The listing of attributes contains one important message that the Indian men do not gloss the malevolent powerful avenging goddesses. However, all their signifiers for women are borrowed from a list of weak and passive attributes.

With the emergence of Hinduism as pan Indian religious tradition, the horny generalisation of the common folk, the religions and the institutions of Sanskrit-based Hinduism, Kali has emerged as a central woman deity. Many myths and legends highlight the greatness of the goddess, Kali. There is an amalgamation of the malfic and protective versions of the goddess. Kali is a life source and breath of life and hence any living person is supposed to have the instinct within him/her. Wikipedia Encyclopaedia provides the following notes on “Devis”.

In the Rig Veda, the name Kali first appears, not as a goddess but as the black tongue of the seven flickering tongues of Agni, the Hindu god of fire. The prototype of Kali, however, appears in the goddess named Raatri. Raatri is considered the prototype of both Durga and Kali. In the Sangam era of Tamilakam, a Kali-like bloodthirsty goddess named Kottravai appears in the literature of the period. Like Kali, she has dishevelled hair,
inspires fear in those who approach her and feasts on battle grounds littered with the dead. It is quite likely that the fusion of the Sanskrit goddess Raatri and the indigenous Kottravai produced the fearsome goddesses of medieval Hinduism.

It was the composition of the *Puranas* in late antiquity that firmly gave Kali a place in the Hindu Pantheon. Kali or Kalika is described in the *Devi-Mahatmyam* (also known as the Chandi or the Durasaptasati) from the *Markanda puranam* written between 300-600CE where she is said to have emanated from the brow of the goddess Durga, a slayer of Demons or avidya, during one of the battles between the divine and anti-divine forces. In this context Kali is considered the forceful form of the great goddess Durga. In the later traditions, Kali has become inextricably linked with Shiva. The unleashed form of Kali often becomes wild and uncontrollable, and only Shiva is able to tame her. This is both because she is often a transformed version of one of his consorts and because he is able to match her wildness.

The story of woman’s subjugation could be traced to the days of consolidation of the days of this concept of Shiva, the tamer and controller of Kali, the overflowing and overwhelming energy. This reading credits woman with power as it also credits man as a tamer. There are many legends about the conflict and the resolution between Shiva and Kali. The Shiva-Parvathi dance that figures in many legends with all its variations affirms the fact that the man and the woman are drawn into an eternal dance of announcing each one’s subjectivity. Interestingly, the conflict is pictured in many Hindu legends as an art form of dance, which involves the mind and the body. This aesthetics could also be read in the contemporary ‘body poetics’.

Kali is also worshipped as the Great Mother, devoid of her usual violence. With the conceptualization of Kali as Mother, the malevolent element got disinvested and the quality
of nurture and sustenance are associated. When Shiva and Parvathi are recognized as a 
single icon, the total consciousness of the man and the woman is achieved as an ideal 
cosmic entity. While the Shiva–Parvathi dance is the reality, the yoking of the two is an 
ideal. Hindu theology has somehow chosen to address this issue of submission and 
subjugation on one hand, and the union and the bonding as the inevitable on the other. 
However, when it comes to values distilled by culture, the division is strong and the union is 
more an illusion than a reality. In the various ‘Devis’ made available in the legends and 
believed by the common folks, one finds the protesting woman, the angry woman and also 
the creative woman. Women folks of India as they believed in this legend came to agree 
that in the various versions, one finds the manifestation of woman’s power and subjectivity.

Right from the evolution of Kali to the consolidation and acceptance of the various 
Mahavidyas one finds availed of hidden attempt to erase the gender bias. Hence, 
Bagalamukhi is inverted with a cudgel in her right hand with which she could beat an 
enemy and pull out his tongue. The action of Bagalamukhi hands out a stunning blow on the 
enemy (monthly men folks). Bhuvaneswari with a radiant complexion on a beautiful face is 
associated with underliving creation. Her vermilion resembling the sunrise is symbolic of 
power over the elements. Bhairavi, another mahavidhya, is associated with destruction and 
the mahapralaya, the doomday. So, one could identify her as goddess of anger. Chinnamasta 
is portrayed as a goddess in naked or scantily dressed state. She holds sword in one of her 
hands and severed head on the other hand. She has two female associates also. In some 
icons Chinnamasta is shown as standing on the couple, Kamadeva and Rati locked in sexual 
union. Thin image reveals the sexual energy of woman. Dhumavathi, another Devi, ugly 
and angry, shown as a widow riding in a chariot with the emblem of the crow (a symbol 
carrion eater) is a rude, angry and thirsty goddess.
Both Anita Nair and Githa Hariharan make a special mention of the Mahadevis as representative voices of the subaltern. There is a desire within the heart of the women of India to take revenge upon the society that has subjugated them in the name of inferior human subjects. Hindu lawgivers like Manu, being male authors of living codes, have been partisan to the women of India. They desired a social system that favoured men, and consolidated it in the name of culture. The origin and consolidation of these myths, subvert the Hindu patriarchal reading of the woman’s status. It was based on a concept that treats women as weak and inferior in body and intellect when compared to man. The weaker sex with the polluted body could remain as subservient and silent. Many of the Mahadevis are manifestations of protest, anger, violence and hatred. They hate the game of the male and have devised the goddess endowed with beauty, wisdom, intelligence, as well as anger and violence. Women folks of India have learnt about these myths as tales and legends passed on from grandmothers to granddaughters. If at all they return to India’s culture after their mobility ventures and the rendezvous attempts with the West, it is only to anchor them in this protest. So, what we find in recent Indian woman fiction is in one sense, a restatement of hidden protests in ‘Devi’ myths.

Thus, the foregoing discussion reveals that Indian women writers are concerned with subjectivity and identity. When one writes about woman’s identity and subjectivity, it is always conditioned by a general understanding about the two terms - subjectivity and identity. In this respect, Indian women writers are not different from their counterparts in other languages. But a significant aspect of the identity and subjectivity emerges from the local space which this researcher would like to name as ‘Indian Theme’. These women writers are exclusively Indian in the sense that, their arguments are meaningful in the feminist space, which is also a family space. India does not adore single-parent or family-less subjectivity. The major characters in the narratives of these writers function in a family
space or they end their journey returning to a family. Western subjectivity is anchored in individual space, while Indian subjectivity is community-oriented. Hence, the 'well-meetings' or 'women gossip' provide the women an opportunity to understand the self and identity. In addition, one finds that the Indian women writers are very much concerned with the evil hands of patriarchy and how it extends into the making of stereo-type women, through a process of culture.

Naturally, these women writers also attempt to defy and resist the enslaving hands of culture. For this very purpose, they choose to walk out of their homes, plan to go out of the orbit of family and seek new experience in new cultures. But the journeys have to end and inheritance should be chosen with modifications. Hence they return to culture with better understanding of its good and evil aspects. They come back with the illuminated wisdom and new knowledge obtained through new experiences. The new Indian woman lives in a better frame of mind choosing the good in Indian culture and rejecting the evil and the stereo-type. They emerge as *women of liquidity* rather than the *solid women* of the past. Hence, it is argued that the Indian women writers, in spite of all their transcendent desires, find something significant in their own immanent culture.

This study is an interesting addition to the growing interest of researchers in Indian writing in English and offers scope for extending the areas of investigation on lines of comparative study.
Chapter – V

Notes and References

Books and Other Nonperiodical Publications


Luce Irigaray, Le Tempe de la différence, (Paris Librairie Générale Française, 30.)


Articles and Other Publications in Periodicals and Electronic Publica

Antonia Navarro -Tejero, “On Fundamentalisms and Nationality: An Interview with


Catherine R. Stimpson, “Feminism and Feminist Criticism,” The Massachusetts


Radhakrishnan, “Post Coloniality and the Boundaries of Identity” CALAALOO 16.4
